

2003 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Creating jobs and solving problems!



Representative
GIGI TALCOTT

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for taking the time to begin reading our newsletter. Government is important stuff. Hopefully this newsletter will give you some additional insight into how Mike and I have been representing you in Olympia this year. Despite the **dreadful economic times, the empty "rainy day" account and spiraling health care costs**, we were able to write a **balanced state budget that protected vital state services without raising taxes**.

I love working the details, so please call, write or e-mail me with any question or request this newsletter may trigger. My home phone is 564-9779.

This year was difficult for me personally as I was torn between my responsibilities in Olympia and caring for my mother with cancer in California. Fortunately, when our job in Olympia was done, I was able to care for her in her home where she passed away last month. The thoughts and prayers from many of you blessed us richly. Thank you.

After twelve years serving as your state representative, next year will, most likely, be my last. It's truly an honor to serve you in this way!

Gratefully,

Gigi Talcott



Representative
MIKE CARRELL

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2003 legislative session is now over and legislators like myself and Gigi have returned to our home districts buoyed by the knowledge that, by working together, we solved the state's horrendous budget crisis.

We also began addressing problems that had seemed insurmountable in the past. These successes were possible because of the extra time we spent away from our families during the two special sessions that ended on June 11.

Now that I'm home, I'm working my way through my wife's "honey do" list that had been accumulating since the session began in January. Between working in the yard, trimming trees, weeding flowerbeds, and laying tile in our bathroom and attending summer community events, working on future legislation and your concerns, I am keeping very busy indeed.

I hope that, as you read this session report, you will agree that, while it took more time than we would have liked, and while many solutions were the result of compromise, we set a **foundation for the future economic recovery of our state**.

As always, I am honored to be serving you in Olympia, and I welcome your ideas and suggestions. Please, feel free to call me anytime at home, 581-2859. Happy summer.

Sincerely,

Mike

28TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

BUDGET BALANCED WITHOUT NEW TAXES

With our state facing the worst economic recession in a generation, we felt it was imperative that the Legislature balance the state's budget — with a deficit approaching \$3 billion by early June — without a general tax increase.

Dino Rossi, the new Senate budget chairman, built a **budget that avoided tax hikes by establishing priorities and making the tough choices necessary to keep state government living within its means.** By partnering with the governor and many Democrats, he forged a coalition that most often gained thirty votes — even though Republicans held only a one-vote majority in the Senate.

After first proposing \$650 million in new taxes, including a hike in the state sales tax, on the 104th day of the 105-day session, House Democrats approved a budget that required a \$360 million tax increase. Yet, while their budget funded salary increases for public employees, it also made deep cuts in services to the elderly, the developmentally disabled and other vulnerable citizens.

There were many difficult decisions to be made, especially concerning the future of home health care workers and support for our developmentally disabled

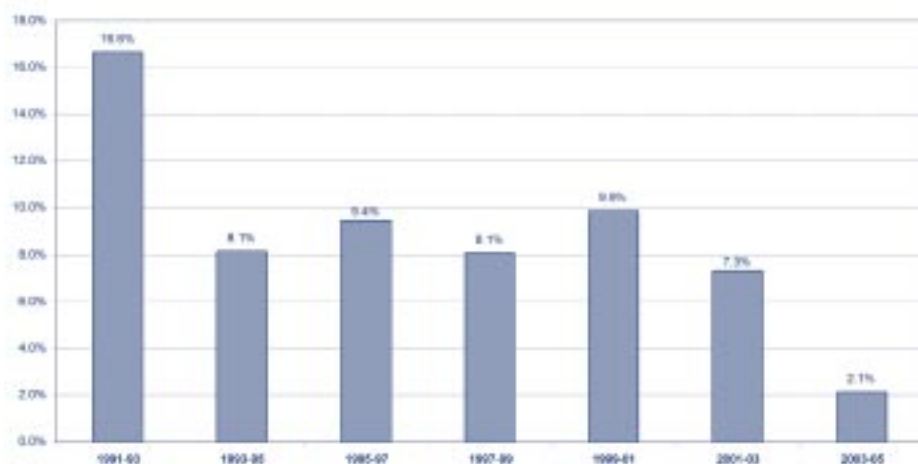
friends. Fortunately, the final budget avoids drastic cuts in services for our developmentally disabled neighbors and troubled youth. It also protects health care services for children and provides a 75 cent-per-hour pay raise for home health care workers.

By meeting with Sen. Rossi, Gigi was able to help **raise the beginning salary for every teacher to at least \$30,000** (that's before health care and retirement benefits). And while most teachers will still get the guaranteed raises on the state salary schedule (and district-negotiated raises from local levies), this year teachers in their first seven years of teaching will get new, additional raises from the state.

Most importantly, the final state budget has no general tax hikes. It also has **the lowest percentage of government growth in the last forty years, yet it protects most of the state government's vital services.**

It's with great relief we can report we got the job done, thanks in part to the thousands of citizens who wrote, called, came to a town hall meeting, sent in their survey or emailed to give us sound advice. Thanks, especially, if you did!

The smallest increase in state spending in over 40 years.



The 2003-05 general-fund budget adopted this year by the Legislature is two percent greater than the 2001-03 general-fund budget.

Budget Fact

Across the nation, 46 other states have budget deadlines they didn't meet by July 1. The worsening fiscal crises, depletion of rainy-day funds, spiraling health care costs and disputes over spending cuts have other states in gridlock. But our Legislature adjourned with a balanced budget that doesn't raise taxes and prioritizes spending. Even though it took us two special sessions, our legislature solved our budget problem before the July 1 deadline. Other states are still struggling to resolve their own budgets.

Source: Chamber newsletter

JOBS. JOBS. JOBS.

Make no mistake. Our economy is struggling. Your job, Gigi's husband's Boeing job, your friend's job and all jobs remain in jeopardy. From July 1999 to November 2002, **our state lost nearly 160,000 jobs**. Washington now ranks second in the nation in unemployment.

And the state where Bill Boeing was born and built his entire business, is now begging for Boeing to build its next plane here.

The problem? **Government regulation and taxes have made Washington one of the most expensive places in the nation for a business to operate.**

At the same time that these private-sector jobs have disappeared, government bureaucracy has grown...and grown...and grown. Since Gary Locke's been our governor, he's hired over 12,000 government employees at an average of \$53,000 per year.

Government jobs cost the taxpayers. Private-sector jobs pay taxes to support the government. Without private-sector jobs we wouldn't have the money needed for public safety, public education and other vital government services. That's why we were absolutely convinced that this year, the **Legislature should focus on protecting and growing jobs.**

Washington is simply no longer competitive when it comes to attracting and retaining employers, both large and small. And as the national economy begins to recover, our state is in grave danger of being left lagging far behind.

We're pleased to report after 105 grueling days plus two "special" sessions, we made significant progress.

Confounding the "experts," a bipartisan group of lawmakers worked with a

coalition of businesses and labor groups to adopt reforms that will continue to protect workers, but also help make our state more competitive, including:

- Bringing the unemployment insurance program more in line with other states.
- Putting common-sense limits on claims made in the workers compensation program.

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Representative **GIGI TALCOTT**
Representative **MIKE CARRELL**

28TH DISTRICT

- Protecting water-rights holders and the supply of clean, usable water for the future.

These reforms are a significant success and they are just a start. We need to continue making changes to remove government barriers to boosting employment, creating jobs and building Washington's economy.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES

■ **Becca funding protected**

Once again, although threatened, funding for our state's Becca laws was preserved.

With Mike's leadership, the Becca laws, named for a teenage runaway who couldn't be helped under old laws and died on the streets of Spokane, were adopted in 1995. They target at-risk adolescent children as a way to help them before they are lost to the streets, and an eventual life of poverty, crime and drugs.

Frankly, the Becca laws are some of the best things to happen to Washington's children in a very long time. Parents now have the tools they need to get a runaway or out-of-control child off the streets and into a short-term safe place. Because adolescents are helped before they get into the offender pattern, we don't have to wait anymore for a crime to be processed before we can bring services to a child and their family. With all adolescents in school, our neighborhoods are safer, as well.

Funding for these kids needs to continue.

■ **Early release of prisoners**

We both opposed a new law, (Senate Bill 5990) because it allowed some convicted prisoners — many of whom we have grave concerns will re-offend — out of prison early and then eliminated their parole supervision.

This was all done with the promise of saving money, but raised enough concerns about the threats to public safety that Mike, who serves as ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee,

was able to stop the worst provisions of the bill. These provisions would have released violent offenders after having served only 50 percent of their sentences, and would have eliminated their parole supervision upon release.

Even though the bill was dramatically improved, allowing the release of so-called nonviolent offenders, we still voted against the measure because we could not support the release of prisoners who were serving time for non-violent offenses but may still have a history of violence.

■ Revising the felony murder statute

In response to a State Supreme Court ruling that our state's long-standing felony murder laws did not apply in cases where the underlying felony was an assault, the Legislature passed a new law reinforcing the original intent.

However, the bill only applies to future assault-driven murders. So, unless the court reverses its decision, we may still be at risk, as the convictions of al-

most 300 other murderers in our state could be overturned by the court ruling.

■ Returning "justice" to the civil justice system

One of the biggest disappointments of the session was that the House failed to consider legislation approved by the Senate that would have implemented comprehensive liability reforms.

The price of insurance that doctors and hospitals need to protect themselves from multi-million dollar lawsuits is too high, and these skyrocketing costs are driving physicians out of practice in Washington. These tort reform measures, proven effective in other states, would help bring down the cost of insurance, keep physicians in practice and reduce the overall cost of health care. They would also help control the rising cost of other liability insurance policies, which have all been increasing dramatically due to exorbitant litigation, for consumers, employers and local governments.

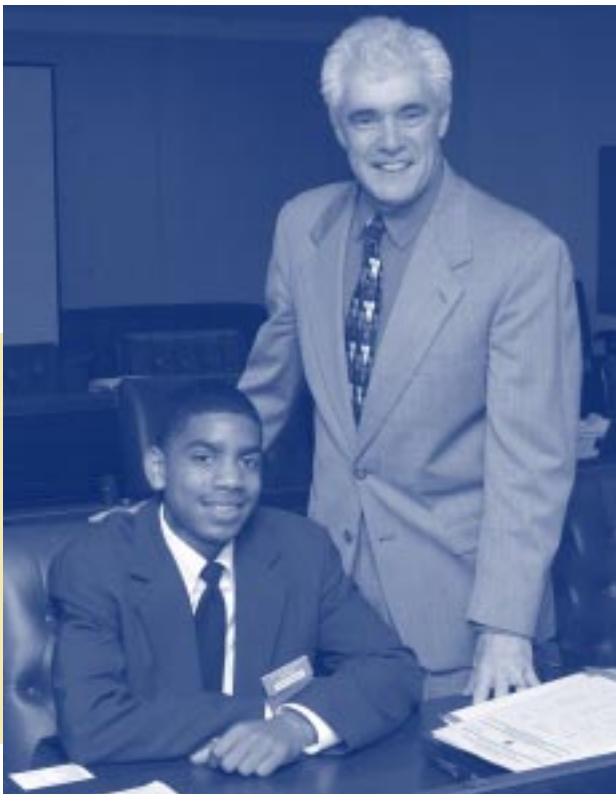
This issue will remain a top priority for us next year.



The Legislature approved a package that will produce \$4.2 billion in new revenues to fund a full slate of transportation-related projects around the state.

This new funding, generated by a 5-cent increase in the state's gas tax, a 15 percent increase in vehicle weight fees, and a .3 percent increase in the sales tax on motor vehicles, is designed to help reduce the traffic congestion, increase safety and improve the economy.

Included are regular performance audits of the Department of Transportation, as well as clear goals and objectives to streamline the state's permitting processes for transportation projects. These reforms should help ensure roads are built better, faster and at less cost, while ensuring that the environment is protected.



Jordan Bridges of Lakewood was one of seven students Rep. Carrell was proud to sponsor as legislative pages this session.

MISSING OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS

You may have heard of “No Child Left Behind.” It’s a Congressional act promoted by President Bush that moves the focus to the child instead of on the system. We share the commitment to educate every child – regardless of race, family income or zip code. Since 1993 the Legislature has been setting **high academic standards, testing** students and working to hold our school leaders **accountable** for good results.

Unfortunately this year was a session of missed opportunities to make meaningful improvements. While improving the quality of education seems to be a high priority of lawmakers, this year, not one of the four major education proposals made it to the governor’s desk for his signature.

■ Public Charter schools

This year’s legislation would have allowed teachers and parents to create their own programs, especially designed to assist educationally disadvantaged students and provide new opportunities for low-income and minority communities. It passed with strong bipartisan support in the Senate. House Democrat leadership failed to bring it up for a vote in the

House. We know in our hearts and from research documents, that the **finest education comes when parents and teachers are working together**. Our state is one of ten states that doesn’t allow teachers and parents these public school choices.

■ Creating clear standards for student, schools and parents

Who do you think needs to know what the expectations for students in, say, fourth grade reading are? The Superintendent of Public Schools?, A testing company on the East Coast?, “Grade level content specialists” in Olympia?, A special committee meeting behind closed doors?, Fourth grade teachers?, Fourth grade students and their parents?, Or all the above?

Right now everyone *except* the students, parents and teachers is informed.

Information is power. We must help parents, students and teachers to become partners wherever we can.

Gigi helped write a bill that would have made it crystal clear which state standards are essential for students to

know in each subject each year. It required that those new expectations would be posted on the OSPI website within the week.

The Legislature failed to make this happen this year, but it’s a “must do” on our lists next session!

■ Fircrest and Rainier schools to remain open

As many in the developmentally disabled community know, this session, a strong push was made to close the Fircrest School in Shoreline and Rainier School in Buckley.

During the debate, we were frustrated that alternatives, like leasing excess properties to support the disabled community or dedicating the savings created by welfare reform to providing these services to the disabled community, were not adopted.

However, we are relieved all the schools will remain open for now.

Thanks to all the residents, their families and our community for working to assure that our state government maintains its commitment to our disabled neighbors.

Rep. Talcott welcomed 4th graders from Whittier Elementary in Fircrest to the Capitol this year.





LOWERING THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The Legislature made a small step with a prescription drug law designed to save the state money when it purchases medications for people with government health coverage.

The new program should help control state expenditures on prescription drugs, and will allow people over age 50 or who are disabled, with annual incomes of less than \$27,000, to share in the power of this bulk purchasing. Also included will be new training programs to educate senior citizens on safe and appropriate

drug use, including offering **"brown bag" meetings** where seniors can bring in all of their medications and receive assistance on sorting and organizing them.

For more information on the new program, contact the state Health Care Authority at (360) 923-2600 or call one of us.

**WE'D LIKE
TO HEAR
FROM YOU!**



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